New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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1944 PRODUCTIONS

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"Seven Lively Arts"

Billy Rose's revue; lyrics and music by Cole Porter; staging and lighting by Hassard Short; scenery by Norman Bel Geddes; sketches directed by Philip Loeb; ballet choreography by Anton Dolin; dances and songs directed by Jack Donahue; costumes by Mary Grant; modern gowns by Valentina; choral group trained by Robert Shaw; orchestra conducted by Maurice Abravanel.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 8, 1944

Seven Lively Arts

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"SEVEN LIVELY ARTS" opened last evening with champagne, a $24 top—and a bang. Into both it and the Ziegfeld Theatre he acquired as a home front, Billy Rose has piled a little bit of everything but the kitchen sink—and if that could dance or were pretty, it probably would be there, too. "Seven Lively Arts" no longer is what it started out to be, a gentle satire on show business and the allied trades, but it has become a gigantic, sprawling spectacle. It is big and rambling, and sometimes it is top-heavy, but there is no getting away from the fact that as a Broadway show it is right in the groove, like Benny Goodman, who is a part of it.

* * *

Mr. Rose apparently has concluded that if you are going to have the lively arts you need the artists. After too long an absence, Beatrice Lillie is back on the Broadway stage, as wry as ever and just as funny. Bert Lahr is twisting his face and contorting the language, and Mr. Goodman and helpers are playing music as it no doubt should be played always. Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin are there for the dancing, and at the other extreme from ballet is Doc Rockwell, delivering a cynical commentary in the style and from the pen of Ben Hecht. Girls are important in all seven of the arts, and so there are girls—the prettiest around at the moment. The scenery and costumes are bright, perhaps even gaudy, if there is a distinction.

Last night, at least the occasion was undoubtedly Miss Lillie's. Well-remembered and loved, and now welcomed home again, she stopped the show before she uttered a word. Permitted finally to proceed, she proved that she still is immense. In a sketch by Moss Hart she gives "Seven Lively Arts" the portrait of an English lady who tries to get on with American soldiers by using the language of their handbooks. In a gigantic pink production number suggesting the satire which once formed the background of the show, she does a weird little dance with Mr. Lahr. She has a couple of individual songs in her old style, and another sketch or two concerned with such matters as buying ballet tickets.

Mr. Lahr also is his old self—as Orson Welles, as the singer of a drinking song to end all drinking songs, as a stagehand in a brief, theatrical expose by George S. Kaufman. Mr. Goodman's contributions are two; he plays a clairinet solo and he leads Red Norva and the rest of his boys in a session to conclude the first act. This number is a sort of Billy Rose house organ, telling what will happen when Billy takes over the Metropolitan Opera, which, no doubt, he soon will. Markova and Dolin also have a couple of numbers, one to Stravinsky music, which probably is not the best they ever have done.

Being huge and sprawling, "Seven Lively Arts" can stand some cutting, and it will be improved thereby. Some of the sketches are too long for the points they make and occasional scenes can be taken out without harm. Cole Porter has written the music for the show, and the tune definitely are not his best. Probably the nearest approach to the old Porter style—he will regret having written all those good ones in former years—is "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye"; "Frahngee-Pahnee" has the beat of the C. P. tom-toms. The songs for the most part are sung by Nan Wynn, Dolores Gray and Mary Roche, who form as attractive a trio as can be found on any one stage. Hassard Short, to whom no spectacle ever looms too large, has directed and lighted "Seven Lively Arts" in his usual manner.

THE CAST

Beatrice Lillie	Nan Wynn
Bert Lahr	Jere McMahon
Benny Goodman	Billy Worth
Alicia Markova	Paula Bane
Anton Dolin	Mary Roche
Doc Rockwell	Dolores Gray
Albert Carroll	Bill Tabbert
Dennie Moore	Michael Barrett

If the traditionalists need the story: It is about a group of young people who come to New York to woo the arts. Mr. Rockwell, and Mr. Hecht back of him, stand in the sidelines joking over the attempt. Not for long does this go on, however. Mr. Rose just throws story to the winds, and "Seven Lively Arts" becomes a revue, or vaudeville, or whatever. And there is a lot of it, and more than enough of it good.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 8, 1944

Not Colossal, But Quite O.K.

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

NO, *The Seven Lively Arts* isn't the greatest thing on wheels; in fact, there's a lot wrong with it. But all in all it's a darn good show.

It's hard to know where to start. The opening, at $24 a seat, was a fabulous spectacle in itself, with the Ziegfeld Theater all shinily refurbished, with gilded middle age out in force and in harness, and with the great lounge, between the acts, like a state reception full of flunkeys and champagne. But being a theater critic and not a society reporter, I'll pass on quickly to the show itself, to the most imposing revue of our time. That it clearly is, an assemblage—or perhaps a conglomeration—of the arts, with some stunning decor, some handsome costumes, a good many splendid showgirls, Cole Porter tunes, Benny Goodman tooting a Stravinsky ballet for Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin, Ben Hecht patter for Doc Rockwell, various assignments for Bert Lahr, and Moss Hart sketches for Beatrice Lillie. A long, fancy, name-studded sentence, this last—but a long, fancy name-studded show. Too long by far; I stayed way past quitting time, and there were still a good many numbers to come. Too fancy in places; and on the whole too name-studded. For though they are all fine names, they tend to crowd one another, and some of them don't live up to themselves.

The great personality of the evening is, of course, Miss Lillie; and Miss Lillie is as wonderful as ever. Her style, whether she is just batting an eyelash or leaping through the air, is inimitable; she is not only the most expert comedienne now on the stage, but by far the funniest. If ever she was able to give proof of how superb she is, it was Thursday night; for by and large, she has been given wretched material and the wrong kind of material; been denied the genuine high-comedy opportunities, and the genuine low-comedy ones, at which she excels. For the most part, she has to make what she can of smarty-pants songs and Broadwayish sketches. Luckily even with these she can make you roar; and when she is given something really right—like the chance to burlesque a nervous lady rendering an aria without a voice — she doubles you up. She is the backbone of the show, and it is she who largely makes it land on its feet.

Miss Markova is the other great artist of the evening; and she and Mr. Dolin, besides executing a *pas de deux* I was forced to miss, are the central figures in the ballet that Stravinsky has created. The music did not seem to me noteworthy, but it offers Miss Markova every chance to display her incomparable technique—her steps, turns, lifts and wonderful descents. Without being very knowledgeable in such matters, I thought that Miss Markova seemed a trifle nervous Thursday night; there was not, for me, the final magic of her performance in the great Ballet Theater roles. But it is dancing such as no Broadway revue has ever seen; and Mr. Dolin's is excellent, too.

Mr. Lahr and Doc Rockwell, both very accomplished performers in their line, are both at a disadvantage. The running patter with which Rockwell, as Mr. Audience, spots the show is not specially amusing. Lahr suffers both from being overshadowed by Miss Lillie in scenes where they appear together, and from working with indifferent material when he holds the spotlight. Cole Porter has done nothing at all overpowering in the way of tunes; his latest languorous number doesn't begin to *Begin the Beguine. Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye* is pleasant, and *Wow-ooh-Wolf* rather amusing; the rest just routine.

One of the really fine things in the show is the first-act finale. Called *Billy Rose Buys the Metropolitan Opera House*, it is an extravaganza of great verve and style based on Rose's past achievements; and it concludes in a Diamond-Horseshoe setting with Benny Goodman and his band. What with Goodman's clarinet playing and Teddy Wilson's performance at the piano, the acts rides to a triumphant finish.

In general, *The Seven Lively Arts* has been handsomely produced, with style seldom sacrificed to mere lavishness. Norman Bel Geddes and Mary Grant have done a good job with the sets and costumes, and Maurice Abravanel a good one with the orchestra. Mr. Rose has dressed up the occasion with the best in show girls. The worst offender is the comedy material; the greatest disappointment is the music. But I had a very good time. Who wouldn't, just from Miss Lillie alone?

NEW YORK POST
December 8, 1944

'Seven Lively Arts' Brings Bee Lillie Back to Broadway

By WILELLA WALDORF

BEATRICE LILLIE came back to Broadway last night after an absence of five years to take part in "Seven Lively Arts," the widely publicized revue produced at the Ziegfeld Theatre by Billy Rose. Mr. Rose refers to it in the program simply as "an entertainment" and then calmly proceeds to fling together the most amazing conglomeration of acts assembled in one theatre since the late S. L. Rothafel staged a "gala premiere" at the Radio City Music Hall that lasted until nearly 2 o'clock in the morning and included everything from grand opera to the Sisters of the Skillet.

"Seven Lively Arts" indulges in so many different moods that it is something like one of those all-star benefit performances where excerpts from Charlot's Revue are sandwiched in between the stage show from the Paramount Theatre and an extravaganza in which a lot of old-fashioned girls dressed in pink swing out over the audiences on strands of roses decorated with colored lights, while a low comedian indulges in a monologue about the female form divine and somebody presents gems from "Aida," with elephants.

In case this sounds a trifle confused, it is a fair example of how we felt on leaving the Ziegfeld Theatre at ten minutes before midnight last night.

Mr. Rose's idea in staging this mammoth musical seems to have been to serve up some-

thing for just about everybody, and since he has been notoriously successful in catering to large audiences, the idea is probably sound.

"Angel Street" Lampoon

Miss Lillie's sketches were written for her by Moss Hart and most of them are content to give her a chance to show how funny she can be without much help from an author. She does wonders with the material she has, though, and along about 11:15 suddenly comes into her own as Mrs. Manningham in a lampoon on "Angel Street."

With Anton Dolin, the dancer, remarkably good as Mr. Manningham, Miss Lillie performs one of the cleverest travesties we have seen her do in years. Mr. Hart, too, is funnier than usual in this sketch and it ought to be placed earlier in the evening. At this rate people who have trains to catch will miss one of the best items in the show.

Bert Lahr is very shabbily treated by the writers but he does manage to be funny when given half a chance. His best number is not a sketch at all, but a Cole Porter drinking song to end all drinking songs.

Mr. Porter also wrote several songs for Miss Lillie, none of them stupendous, but several decked out with fairly amusing lyrics. The Porter score in general is undistinguished and reminiscent of so many earlier hits by the same composer that he seems at times to be plagiarizing his own collected works.

Markova and Goodman

Alicia Markova, the celebrated ballerina, and her partner, Mr. Dolin, presented some traditional ballet in their expert fashion, some of it set to music that sounded just like something by Stravinsky, and was.

We are always fascinated by Miss Markova's dancing and we also enjoy Benny Goodman's clarinet playing, both in classical and more modern rhythms.

But while you're waiting around for Lillie and Lahr, and Markova and Dolin, or Benny Goodman, there is a great deal going on that is just routine old-style musical comedy stuff, elaborate but dull.

And there is also Doc Rockwell, who acts as a sort of master of ceremonies and winds up with one of his anatomy lessons illustrated by a nude female figure in glass.

This was the lowest point of an evening that had more low points than we had expected, somehow, with Lillie and Lahr, Markova and Dolin, plus Benny Goodman with his clarinet.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 8, 1944

'The Seven Lively Arts' —New Era in Magnificence

By BURTON RASCOE

THE NEXT two decades, I suspect are going to known as the Billy Rose era in the theater. In sheer splendor and magnificence—if "The Seven Lively Arts" sets a Billy Rose standard—it will be an era as far ahead of the Ziegfeld era as the latter was ahead of the era of "The Florodora Girl."

The lavishness of the production of "The Seven Lively Arts" is simply breath-taking. You never saw such a dream-world as the one Norman Bel Geddes (sets) and Mary Grant (costumes) have provided as the background for this revue. Fragonard pastorals and Guerin visions of ancient Balbec are reproduced in heroic size on the stage, peopled by exquisitely beautiful girls wearing such fabrics as you can associate only with Marco Polo's tales of the pleasure dome of Kubla Khan.

But that is only the background and the framework. First and foremost, among a galaxy of stars, is Beatrice Lillie, the world's greatest satiric comedienne, the incomparable empress of witty pantomime; and she is provided with delicious burlesque skits by Moss Hart and some very funny lyrics by Cole Porter. She had us all screaming with laughter last night from her first appearance as Lady Agatha Pendleton, an English spinster anxious to make the men of the American armed forces feel at home by talking to them in what she believes is their native language (phrases noted down at the cinema) and shocking the poor boys to death, to her burlesque of Mrs. Manningham in "Angel Street," where she keeps saying, "You're so good to me," when Mr. Manningham maltreats her and when Jeeter Lester calls her names out of "Tobacco Road." Her timing, her voice changes, her postures, her grimaces, her gestures combine in a satiric art that is absolute perfection. She is glorious.

Lahr Funnier than Ever

Next there is Bert Lahr, provided with excellent material by George S. Kaufman, Mr. Hart, Charles Sherman and Mr. Porter—a mellow and subdued Bert Lahr, who is 10 times funnier than I have ever seen him. For one thing, I never saw Mr. Lahr with stuff that had class before; his comedy has been low burlesque and often blue and unsavory. (But, as I told my taxi driver last night, who said he had seen Bert Lahr on the stage several times and wondered if Bert's gags had been cleaned up enough so he could take his wife to the show, "The Seven Lively Arts" is in excellent taste; it will delight young and old.)

Next there is Benny Goodman, who, in the first act engaged in a hot swing jam session with Teddy Wilson at the piano, Red Norvo on the xylophone, Morey Feld with the bass fiddle and Sid Weiss at the drums; and, in the second act, Mr. Goodman plays a classical clarinet solo, in ample evidence that he is the greatest clarinetist living.

Next are Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin in choreographic numbers by Mr. Dolin to musical excerpts from Igor Stravinsky's "Scene de Ballet" and a pas de deux by Mr. Porter. In classical ballet Markova thrills me more than any dancer since Pavlova, whom she resembles in face, grace and style. Mr. Dolin let her shine last night being content with being her necessary male support, but he scissored once to thrill the bobby-soxers among the balletomaniacs.

Doc Rockwell acts throughout the show as expositor, with a running commentary written by Ben Hecht; and, toward the end, gives his famous lecture on female anatomy. The latter is pretty corny, but, as he says, the customers who don't know anything about art but know what they like, like it.

Plenty of Beauty

That expert and ingratiating young tap artist, Jere McMahon, has some specialty numbers, arranged by Jack Donahue, which he dances solo and with Nan Wynne and Mary Roche, two sweet and pretty girls.

Musically (though not lyrically) Cole Porter seems to have lost his inspiration. The score is serviceable without being distinguished or memorable; only one song, "Is It the Girl?", having a catchy melody. The encores for Miss Lillie and Mr. Lahr were for themselves rather than for the songs. But this musical deficiency is hardly noticeable in a show otherwise so opulent in all other respects—so enormously funny and so voluptuous to the eye. For the reopening of the Ziegfeld under his aegis, Billy Rose has shot the works—about $2,000,000 for the theater and production—and it looks as though he were going to live up to his slogan, "The public be served."

The production was staged and lighted by Hassard Short; music and lyrics by Cole Porter; sketches directed by Philip Loeb; choral groups trained by Robert Shaw; orchestra conducted by Maurice Abravanel.

NEW YORK SUN
December 8, 1944

'Seven Lively Arts' Big and Beautiful—and It Has Beatrice Lillie

By WARD MOREHOUSE

BILLY ROSE had his night last night. He opened the Ziegfeld Theater, now his own, on the date anounced months ago and unveiled his new revue, "Seven Lively Arts," which is a whopping show. It's big and beautiful and much of it is in the tradition of Ziegfeld lavishness. The production's principal asset is Miss Lillie. She is wonderful.

The fabulous Mr. Rose has spent untold thousands on the Ziegfeld's new show, which includes a little of everything—sketches and songs, jive, fragments of grand opera, a Stravinsky ballet, Cole Porter tunes, stunning backgrounds and lovely girls. If the production is not the revue to end all revues, if it seems to fall somewhat short of its pre-Broadway build-up, let it be said that that advance ballyhoo was something that would probably be beyond the reach of any show.

"Seven Lively Arts" is a prodigal affair—and what a pay roll! Besides Beatrice Lillie, it brings along Bert Lahr of the acrobatic eyes and contortions of visage; Benny Goodman and his wizardry with the clarinet; Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin in a ballet to the music of Igor Stravinsky, and Doc Rockwell, who, as Mr. Audience, wanders through the proceedings, commenting on the show and its participants. There is a great deal too much of the Doc. Mr. Lahr, frequently one of the funniest men of the musical comedy stage, has had far better material than that now afforded him.

As for Miss Lillie, she is again the perfect clown. She returns in great form, and she supplies most of the comedy of the evening. She is back with her sense of timing and her pauses and inflections, her assumptions of dignity and her serenity and archness. She is very funny indeed in Moss Hart's sketch, "There'll Always Be an England," appearing as Lady Agatha and trying the American vernacular upon some American soldiers. She is Mrs. Manningham in a good sketch, "Heaven on Angel Street," with its participants including Mr. Lahr as Clarence Day and Albert Carroll as Jeeter Lester, and she has some good song numbers—particularly "Dancin' to a Jungle Drum." It is quite an evening for Miss Lillie.

The production goes in for elaborate spectacle effects, in the Ziegfeld manner, and one of the exciting numbers is the finale of the first act—"Billy Rose Buys the Metropolitan Opera House," which brings in touches of "Carmen Jones" and the Aquacade, and just about everything except the Frontier Centennial. Benny Goodman is in this with his clarinet and present, too, are his red-hot associates, such as Teddy Wilson and Red Norvo, with piano, xylophone, bass viol and drum.

There is a lot of talent in the show that doesn't crowd its way into the big-name billing. Mary Roche is quite lovely in her songs. Nan Wynn and Dolores Gray and Billie Worth are effectively present. Jere McMahon does an excellent toreador dance. Anton Dolin, besides his ballet contributions, appears in Mr. Hart's "Angel Street" sketch.

Norman Bel Geddes has done some fetching backgrounds for "Seven Lively Arts." Hassard Short has given his skill to the lighting effects, and Cole Porter has written some nice tunes. Particularly "Is It the Girl?" "Hence It Don't Make Sense," "Only Another Boy and Girl" and "Wow-ooh-wolf!" as done by the Misses Wynn, Gray and Roche.

The premiere of "Seven Lively Arts" brought forth a distinguished audience and the Ziegfeld Theater is again one of the show places of the town. And so begins the dauntless Mr. Rose's regime in Sixth Avenue. Now, with his revue produced, he can give his time to such a trifle as "King Henry VIII." Or even "King Lear."

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 8, 1944

'Seven Lively Arts' At Ziegfeld Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

LAST NIGHT at Sixth ave. and 54th st., Billy Rose passed a miracle. He turned back the cloth and, abracadabra, there was no World War II. If seeing were believing, there never would be! Once again, as in the good old days, the Ziegfeld was the most beautiful theatre on Manhattan, an audience was

all dressed up for evening, a long line of limousines was waiting at the curb, a star-studded service was a prop for comedy and champagne flowed like water.

The miracle passed by Mr. Rose was in behalf of "Seven Lively Arts," his not unheralded extravaganza with lyrics and music by Cole Porter, staging and lighting by Hassard Short, funny sayings by Moss Hart and Ben Hecht, scenery by Norman Bel Geddes, costumes by Mary Grant, gowns by Valentina, orchestral direction by Maurice Abravanel, ballet choreography by Anton Dolin, song and dance direction by Jack Donahue, choral group training by Robert Shaw, and so forth and so on.

Seats for last night's first performance were $24 each, when you could get them. Champagne was free, and you could get all of that you wanted. And, as if wine for everybody were not enough, there were also paintings by Salvador Dali, depicting the seven lively arts and what he would do with them. Along with the entertainment, of which they are an offspring, last night's high hat, low neck congregation found them vastly entertaining. The lack is doubtless mine.

• • •

Plot Disappears

When I was fortunate enough to visit Billy Rose last Summer in his — and Eleanor Holm's—charming mansion hard by a swimming pool, "Seven Lively Arts" was what is known as a book show. From curtain rise to curtain fall, there was a story, a story dealing with seven young hopefuls who come, all starry-eyed, to New York to work out their ambitions—a painter, a tap dancer, a radio singer, a ballet dancer, a playwright, a stage actress and a movie actress.

Now, save for a brief interlude which gets the evening going, these motivating would-be artists have disappeared. In their place comes old Doc Rockwell, apologizing between numbers for their absence. I have never found the doctor very funny and, in the face of his current cut-ups supplied by Mr. Hecht, his on-stage goings on are helped out none too happily. To reverse Sir Herbert Tree's justly celebrated saying, he is vulgar without being funny.

Bert Lahr, a fine favorite hereabouts, suffers from the same shortcoming. I mean, the lack of good laughable material. As the Stagehand in George S. Kaufman's "Local Boy Makes Good;" as the Toastmaster in Cole Porter's drinking song to end all drinking songs; as the Patient in the doctor's office without which no such show as "Seven Lively Arts" can be complete, as Clarence Day in "Heaven on Angel Street," he gives everything that's in him. Outside help is what he needs.

Critics Take It

This "Heaven on Angel Street" is a savage burlesque on us professional first-nighters who go down to our seats on passes. And also, I should fancy, libelous. At any rate, we all pretended to find it very funny especially the Mr. Rascoe, whose name is mentioned, and the Mr. Nathan, who is stabbed through the heart (if any) right up there on the Ziegfeld stage. According to Moss Hart, the author, our mothers were fond of bones, and our fathers refused to marry them.

Also, according to Mr. Hart, Beatrice Lillie is a joy to work with, playing with "surgical precision." She's also a joy to have back in our midst, as Lady Agatha in "There'll Always Be An England," cleaned up since the Philadelphia premiere; as the Customer in "Ticket for the Ballet;" as the renderer of "When I Was a Little Cuckoo," and the extremely entertaining "Dancin' To a Jungle Drum," and the burlesque Mrs. Manningham in "Heaven on Angel Street. The laughs are mostly hers.

More of this later. Billy Rose's latest production is long, opulent, beautiful and, I fear, neither as tuneful nor as laughable as it might be. In it is enough first-rate material for a history-making enterprise. But, as "Seven Lively Arts" now stands, it's not altogether what Mr. Rose must have ordered. Something should, could and probably will be done about its humor, which needs mending, its vulgarity, which needs editing, and its length, which is inordinate.

Somewhere in this "Seven Lively Arts," a show of shows is buried. Last night it didn't happen to be forthcoming. There's even more gold in them there ills up at the Ziegfeld. Now that the current conflict has been pushed miraculously into the future, dig down and get it, Billy.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 8, 1944

Elaborate Floor Show

By HOWARD BARNES

BILLY ROSE has refurbished the handsome Ziegfeld Theater to present an opulent grab-bag of entertainment. "Seven Lively Arts" is both inspired and ordinary. Thanks to the participation of Beatrice Lillie, the new revue has a solid core of high comedy which makes one wait expectantly for the Moss Hart sketches in which she appears. The waiting is always rewarding. And in between times, Bert Lahr glug-glugs in familiar fashion; Benny Goodman plays hot and classical compositions on his clarinet, while Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin execute entrechats and a pas-de-deux or two to music by Igor Stravinsky.

• • •

The arts are lively enough in this latest of the mujik-trap maestro's offerings. If you are willing to accept Doc Rockwell's inclusion of sex as the liveliest of them all, there are considerably more than seven represented at the Ziegfeld. Unfortunately the Cole Porter score does not come through with the melody and authority which might have held the show in a loose unity. For too much of the time it is little more than a lavish night club exhibit. As such, it is ordinary, despite its extravagance of talent and production pomp.

• • •

Miss Lillie never fails Rose in accenting the high points of a stunning and brilliantly variegated musical pot-pourri. She is so good in "There'll Always Be an England" and "Fragonard in Pink" that her malicious satire in a crack at the critics called "Heaven on Angel Street" had to be inspired to top her earlier numbers. Meanwhile, she sings several comical songs, notably "Dancin' to a Jungle Drum," which lift the show right up by its bootstraps every time she is on stage.

• • •

She has been fortunate in having Hart for a gag-man. He has done far better for her than Ben Hecht has for Lahr in several of his humorous excursions. It is a safe bet that sketches and music will take on more consecutive excitement as "Seven Lively Arts" is exposed to the acid test of audience reaction. Hassard Short has staged it well. Norman Bel Geddes has decked it out in striking settings. With Goodman tooting away magnificently, the ballet numbers, Albert Carroll's occasional quips and some excellent singing, the show is every bit the "entertainment" which it pretends to be, even if it is a bit disappointing at the moment.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 8, 1944

'The Seven Lively Arts' Gives All — And Beatrice Lillie Is the Best

By JOHN CHAPMAN

WELL, thank goodness, *that's* over with! Now we can all relax. Billy Rose opened "The Seven Lively Arts" at the Ziegfeld Theatre last night.

For more than one reason this will be a news report rather than a notice—if there's any difference—for the $24 tickets, the colossal buildup, the free champagne served in the basement and the presence of the dressiest, pushingest, celebrated-est dammedest audience in many years made the premiere a news event rather than a show.

Billy Rose is on his own, and there will be no mention here but this of the late Florenz Ziegfeld, and no comparisons. Billy bought the theatre, made it clean and beautiful again. He engaged talent ranging from Salvador Dali to Igor Stravinsky, with a detour to Dr. Rockwell. He spent money like a Persian prince on Bel Geddes sets, Mary Grant costumes, girls who can sing, girls who look beautiful, writers who can write and ushers who can ush.

He also was clever enough to engage Beatrice Lillie. I did not see all of "The Seven Lively Arts" last night for it ran long and I had to see a printer about an edition—but all of what I did see was Miss Lillie's in spite of some lusty competition from another gifted low comic, Bert Lahr.

A Memorable Greeting

The reception Miss Lillie received at her first appearance is something she will never forget, and I won't either. The handclaps and the cheers spoke everything—admiration for a superb comedienne, affection for an old and dear friend and a glowing, enthusiastic welcome home; for we think Miss Lillie belongs to us and home must be here.

Miss Lillie responded gallantly, singing goofy songs like the one about when she was a cuckoo, buying a ticket to a ballet which she thinks is named "S. Hurok," being hostess in a British canteen for GI's and trying to be chummy out of a handbook on American slang. She never was funnier.

Lahr's Drinking Song

Mr. Lahr, after warming up in a sketch about a stagehand who hates scenery, really got going in a drinking song to end all drinking songs, from "Robin Hood" and "The Student Prince" on down. In this one Mr. Lahr, dressed as an admiral of Lord Nelson's time and backed by a stout chorus of sailors, got plastered. It was delightful.

There is so much in Mr. Rose's show that it can hardly be catalogued and the wonder is that it can be played. It skips from a jam session by Benny Goodman and his crew to a rigidly classical dance by two of the top ballet artists, Markova and Dolin; it runs from glittering production numbers to simple blackouts, and Cole Porter takes the music from love songs to blazing jungle numbers and a really witty trio titled "Wow-oohwolf!" Its decor by Norman Bel Geddes scales from modest backdrops to full-stage knockouts. Its gowns by Valentina are seductive and so are the lovely things who wear them.

Last night, as I say, "The Seven Lively Arts" was a news event first and a show second. As a show it is still overweight in spite of a practice session in Philadelphia, and some of its sketches fall short of the mark. But, now that the opening is over with, it will pick up speed and be a whale of a revue. On leaving it—if you can get in—you will be simply drunk with the money that's been spent on you.

I hope Mr. Rose asks me back in a week or two so I can do a notice.

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1945

MOTION PICTURE

Critics' Review

"A Bell for Adano"

Play by Paul Osborn, based on the novel of the same name by John Hersey; staged by H. C. Potter; settings designed by Motley; presented by Leland Hayward at the Cort Theatre, December 6, 1944.

THE CAST

Major Victor Joppolo	Fredric March
Sergeant Leonard Borth, M.P.	Everett Sloane
Giovanni Zito	Gilbert Mack
Guiseppe Ribaudo	Tito Vuolo
Cacopardo	Silvio Minciotti
Craxi	Joe Verdi
Captain Purvis	Bruce MacFarlane
Bill Munroe	Rex King
Father Pensovecchio	Leon Rothier
Sergeant Frank Trapini	Jack Arnold
Corporal Chuck Schultz	Fred Barton
Joe Pollock	Clark Poth
Tina	Margo
Gargano	Harold J. Stone
Marguerita	Miriam Goldina
Carmelina	Alma Ross
Sofia Laura	Florence Aquino
Bellanco	Michel Vallon
D'Arpa	Mario Badolati
Spinnato	Doreen McLean
Colonel George Middleton	Harry Selby
Pietro Afronti	Albert Raymo
Carlo Erba	Charles Mayer
Basile Giovanni	J. Scott Smart
Nasta	Rolfe Sedan
Tomasino	Alexander Granach
Lieut. Livingston	Phil Arthur

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 7, 1944

'A Bell for Adano' Beautiful and Touching

By BURTON RASCOE

JOHN HERSEY'S beautiful and touching little story of practical democracy, "A Bell for Adano," seems destined to be as great a success on the stage as it was as a novel; for Paul Osborn has recreated it for the theater with brilliant and loving care; H. C. Potter has given it a very sensitive masterwork of direction; and Leland Hayward has bestowed upon it a magnificent production. Fredric March, who is starred, contributes one of the very finest performances of his distinguished career.

The play opened last night at the Cort with an overture of string and acordion music and the Italian airs set a mood, both plaintive and gay, grim and hopeful, light and serious, which the comedy-drama maintained throughout the evening. Just as the novel is, so far, the finest piece of imaginative literature the war has produced, so also, I think, the play is the finest drama the war has given us.

The novel, as you know, presents in a subtle and poignantly humorous way the greatest problem the Allied armies have to face in their dealings with the liberated countries, if this war, and our success in it, is to have any meaning. It is the problem of first learning, for ourselves, what democracy, freedom and justice mean. They are not merely principles but principles in action—in all things, big and little. Many Americans, who think they know what democracy is, don't.

Theme of Toleration

For one thing, Mr. Hersey implies, we must learn to sympathize with and understand other people. The USA is a wonderful country and our ways suit us, but when we find ourselves (especially as members of conquering armies) in liberated countries where they have customs, traditions and tastes different from our own, we must not arrogantly brush these customs, traditions and tastes aside as ridiculous (as long as they are not political or military menaces) for they are of the very heart of the people. We must try to understand those upon whom we wish to bestow the blessings of democracy.

The good people of Adano bore a great hatred for the Fascists before the American troops occupied the town, but their hatred was aroused not so much by the fact that they were starved, murdered, swindled and forced into submission to tyranny by the Fascists as by the loss of the symbol of life to them—the 700 year old bell with the fine tone, which rang out above all other bells in the steeple of the city hall. The Fascists had confiscated the bell to make guns; that to the citizens of Adano was their greatest crime.

Naturally, Maj. Joppolo (Mr. March) of the AMG could not, at first, understand why there should be so much fuss about a bell, when there were much more "important" things to consider; the population was starving, the streets were filthy, a plague seemed imminent. But, though American, he was the son of Italian immigrants. He understood enough of the temperament of the villagers for it to dawn on him that the bell was more important to them than bread.

Maj. Joppolo had no sooner explained to the town council what the principles of democracy are and that Americans are different from Nazis and Fascists than an American general roared through town like a Hitler, overturning a cart that had obstructed his path and peremptorily ordering all carts (including, of course, those bearing food and water) to be barred from the city and how Maj. Joppolo was broken and transferred for insubordination when he countermanded this brutal decree but won the love and respect of the people—that and how a bell was got for Adano is the story.

And how entertainingly, how effectively this story is told on the stage! There is a platonic love affair, involving Mr. March and Margo, thrown in when it might better have been thrown out; but it does afford an excuse for one of the finest and funniest scenes—that in which Alexander Granach, as Margo's intransigent fisherman father, invites Mr. March to dinner after he has been won over by Mr. March.

Practically the whole cast is wonderful in their diversified characterizations, but special praise must go to Charles Mayer, J. Scott Smart and Albert Raymo for their bit where the cart drivers get audience with the American AMG commandant; to Leo Rothier, as Father Pensovecchio; to Rolfe Sedan, as the former Fascist mayor, and to Tito Vuolo, as the interpreter. . . . Here's another fine addition to the season's theatrical treats. It is rich in comedy, though the theme is deep.

NEW YORK SUN
December 7, 1944

'A Bell for Adano,' Done at Cort, a Vibrant War Drama, Expertly Acted

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE CORT theater has finally found a good play. Paul Osborn's dramatization of John Hersey's novel, "A Bell for Adano," brought into 48th street last night by Leland Hayward, is a vibrant drama—crowded, colorful, expertly acted and directed, and you can put it down as a hit, and as an important contribution to the current season.

Mr. Osborn's play follows the book closely. It presents and projects a vital character in the American major, born in the Bronx, who uses tact, toughness, anger, good humor, idealism and his own sense of justice and decency in rehabilitating a Fascist town in Sicily. The role of the major is played with tremendous force and variety by Fredric March. His is a beautiful job.

The captured town of Adano, filthy, hungry and war-scarred, and shorn of its 700-year-old bell, is in a bad way when Major Joppolo, civil affairs officer for the Allied Military Government, moves into City Hall at the beginning of Act One. He takes over and applies the principles of American democracy. He countermands an irate general's order and brings the mule carts back into town because they provide food and water. He puts a real fisherman in charge of the fishermen. He wins the loyalty and love of the people. His work is still unfinished when he is abruptly transferred because of his countermand, but he has given the town reason to live again. And he has brought a new bell to Adano.

Mr. Osborn's play is in three acts and seven scenes. It straggles occasionally, but it has warmth, feeling and believability throughout. There are good comedy touches here and there and they spring from honest characterization. There is a reality about the people flowing in and out of scenes and some of the incidental characters are wonderful. The American M.P.'s look and act and talk like M.P.'s and without ever overdoing it. Mr. Osborn skillfully presents Adano's chaotic state under Fascist rule and its need of a guiding hand, such as Joppolo's—and its need of another bell, a symbol of good will, to supplant that taken away by the Fascists to make gun barrels.

There is acting in this new play at the Cort. Mr. March brings humanness and warmth and force to the role of the understanding, high-minded and sentimental soldier of Italian parentage who tells the GIs why they're in Europe and what is expected of them. Margo is appealing as Tina, a part not very important to the play. Everett Sloane is extraordinarily good as a cynical M.P. sergeant who is worshipful of the major. Bruce MacFarlane, as the captain of M.P.'s who turns in the major, does his best work since "Sailor, Beware."

There's a lusty performance from Alexander Granach as the head fisherman and excellent ones from Rolfe Sedan as the scurvy Fascist Mayor and J. Scott Smart as the protesting driver of a mule cart. Gilbert Mack and Tito Vuolo present a first-rate comedy team. And there's a grand bit from Phil Arthur as the naval lieutenant who made the Navy via the Yale crew.

The actors are there to play this play and under H. C. Potter's direction they play it! Mr. Potter's long absence in Hollywood has not caused him to lose any of his feeling for the theater, or any of his skill in handling stage groupings.

"A Bell for Adano" is a war play of great vitality. Paul Osborn's dramatization of the Hersey novel is an enormously good one and Leland Hayward, making his bow as a producer, can take pride in his judgment in seeing a play in the book and backing that judgment with an admirable presentation.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 7, 1944

'Bell for Adano' Bows At the Cort Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

PAUL OSBORN, who, for quite a while now, has had a winning way with the translating of novels into plays, has done a remarkably able job in getting John Hersey's best-selling "A Bell for Adano" down from the bookshelf and up onto the stage. Last evening, at the Cort Theatre, Mr. Hersey's story of post-Fascist Sicily turned out to be a delightful tragicomedy, a ruefully entertaining report on current Italian-American relations and how they get that way.

No newspaper front-page could be more honest, more revealing. Or as entertaining as it goes about it. It's not until you've left the playhouse with encores ringing in your ears that you realize you've been seeing a comedy about a tragedy, a tale of stupidity in high places, a narrative of blundering bureaucracy the like of which—in all the liberated countries, as well as Italy—are apt to be repeated and repented around the world.

In "A Bell For Adano," Leland Hayward's first solo production, all this is made quite clear. Thanks to a large company's well-nigh flawless acting, thanks to H. C. Potter's well-nigh flawless direction, the point gets over. Having opened your mouth with laughter, a

tragic, far-reaching truth is shoved down your throat before you know it.

Bad General

While getting the John Hersey novel down from the bookshelf and up onto the stage, Paul Osborn has corralled its Adano-wide action, and confined it to the former office of the Mayor of the City Hall. It took a bit of doing, I'm sure. But the new arrival at the Cort is all the better for it. The narrative is clarified; the pace is quickened; the characters are motivated; the denouement—the heartbreaking denouement—is made more significant.

The "A Bell For Adano" that is a play differs in no great manner from the "A Bell For Adano" that is a novel. The town has fallen to its deliverers. The townspeople are frightened, confused, mistrustful, helpless. They need food and water; faith and guidance, cleanliness and rest. But most of all they need their bell, a bell which, for 700 years, has struck the hours, a bell which from babyhood, has regulated their nights and days.

All these things the American born Major Victor Joppolo works his heart out to provide. But, because an unoffending Adano water-carter gets in an offending American general's way, the entire town must suffer; the major who is its saviour must be removed; the Adanions' innate distrust of Americans must be renewed.

Good Play

Let me confess that, at the outset, the confusion of tongues is disturbing. Why, you ask yourself, should native Sicilians use broken English to one another? Again, why are the deliveries from overseas, the troops of occupation, past masters of the difficult Sicilian dialect? And, once again, why should Capt. Purvis, head of the Military Police, be hell-bent to get Major Victor Joppolo in trouble? But these questions don't really matter.

What does really matter is that "A Bell For Adano" is a well-written, well-acted, well-staged tragicomedy about something actually important. Outstanding performances in an outstanding and timely play are those of Fredric March as the major; Everett Sloane as his faithful sergeant; Bruce MacFarlane as the tell-tale M. P. captain; Albert Raymo, Charles Mayer and J. Scott Smart as the priceless cart-drivers. And Margo as Tina, the uncalled-for.

The season is bigger and brighter and better for "A Bell For Adano." And the Cort, none too fortunate of late, should be thankful for it. When I insist that it seems more like a mighty good play than a mighty good dramatization, I mean to assure you that it's a brand new offering to see, to laugh with, to ponder over carefully.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 7, 1944

A Small Bell But a Nice One

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

A bestseller in book form, *A Bell For Adano* will also do very well on Broadway. Paul Osborn has proved resourceful in adapting it for the stage, and has been at great pains to preserve the spirit of the novel. By and large, he *has* preserved it; and it is a spirit that possesses warm appeal and a very genuine meaning. It goes farthest, I think, toward making *Adano* a nice evening in the theater; for though the play certainly has other virtues, it also has decided weaknesses.

Adano is as much parable as story; an affirmation, in the character of Maj. Victor Joppolo, of democracy as both an ideal and a process. Going into the Italian town of Adano as administrator for AMG, Joppolo, by his earnestness, humaneness and inflexible sense of purpose, restores to a community long fettered by Fascism a decent, happy, self-respecting way of life. He gets for it, too, a bell to replace the 700-year old one that Mussolini's men had stolen; the old bell had been a symbol to the people; the new one is a symbol of The People themselves.

The other side of the medal to Joppolo is, of course, the overbearing Gen. Marvin who, because a cart got in the way of his jeep, forbade any carts to enter the town and doomed its inhabitants to want and starvation. (In the play the notorious general does not appear; he is only heard bellowing offstage.) For countermanding Marvin's order Joppolo is kicked out at the end, but not before his mission is accomplished and the new bell rings out lustily and symbolically from the clock-tower.

As parable, *Adano* speaks its message warmly and vigorously on the stage, as it did in the book. But on the stage, the absence of any very dramatic story becomes more noticeable —the more so as the colorful life of the town, which gave the book flow and variety, is reduced to a procession of characters coming in and out of one room in the City Hall. Some of these are very good characters, both Italian and American; and they make for good scenes — touching, humorous, now and then even rather eloquent. But there are also times when the play merely stutters along, and times when it seems rather jerky. And the girl Tina is at an awkward disadvantage through having to keep turning up in Joppolo's office, where she seldom seems to belong.

For that matter, compressing *Adano* into play form puts Joppolo at rather a disadvantage. The crusading element in him is a perfectly valid one; for it is just such men as he who — by their idealism and perseverance — put democracy into action. But in the play, where one delegation after another files before him, he is forever *expounding* his ideals. And this is not only preachy, but needless; Joppolo's deeds speak plentifully for him.

The play has been given a very competent, if never brilliant, production. Mr. Potter has directed well; and as Joppolo, Fredric March plays with the right strength and sincerity. No doubt the role itself lacks color, but Mr. March might have made it more spirited. Margo does as much as she can with Tina; and in minor roles there are some very good performances by Tito Vuolo, J. Scott Smart, Charles Mayer, and Phil Arthur. Bruce MacFarlane is good too, and Everett Sloane does nicely with a Sergeant Borth who has lost the sarcastic edge he had in the novel. There are appropriate costumes and an appropriate set by Motley.

NEW YORK POST
December 7, 1944

'A Bell for Adano' Makes A Moving and Literate Play

By WILELLA WALDORF

PAUL OSBORN has made a discerning and very moving play from John Hersey's novel, "A Bell for Adano," and Leland Hayward has given it the advantage of an excellent production at the Cort Theatre. The story of Major Joppolo of The Bronx and his efforts to make democracy work in the town of Adano, Sicily, after the Americans took over from the Germans, is even more urgent and full of meaning today than it was during the Sicilian campaign, for Europe is now swarming with Adanos and more are being "liberated" every day.

How America and her Allies are going to cope with the problem of restoring some semblance of peace-time order and prosperity to a war-shattered continent is the concern of "A Bell for Adano" and the experiences of Major Joppolo in one small town are so illuminating, so inspiring, and at the same time so frightening, that the play sends its audience away from the theatre not only stirred but very thoughtful indeed.

This in itself is an achievement so rare on Broadway these days that everybody concerned with "A Bell for Adano" is entitled to take a low bow.

An Offstage Noise

In dramatizing the Hersey novel, Mr. Osborn confines the action to Joppolo's headquarters in the City Hall—the former office of the Mayor, arranged with an ante-room for Captain Purvis and his Military Police. He manages to bring in just about everybody connected with the story except General Marvin who is heard cursing out an erring cart driver on the street outside, ordering his mule shot and all carts removed from the town.

General Marvin, therefore, is just an offstage noise at the Cort. This weakens the struggle between Marvin and Joppolo somewhat, and renders the Major's defiance of the General's orders less impressive than it might have seemed had we been treated to a dose of Marvin's own particular brand of bombast and bluster at closer range.

Considering the fact that Marvin could hardly have helped being a ham role, however, it is probably just as well, on the whole, that the General stays outside and merely uses his influence to oust Joppolo from the job he is doing so well. As the situation develops on the stage it is Captain Purvis, reporting Joppolo, who becomes the immediate villain of the piece. But the ultimate effect is the same.

Joppolo is ousted by a lot of stupid and thoughtless military folderol when he was doing what he had been sent there to do—put a captured town back on its feet, on a democratic basis.

Fredric March plays Major Joppolo with simplicity and deep feeling for the role. He is assisted by a large company that is almost always remarkably right. As Tina, the fisherman's daughter, Margo brings her moving voice and warm sincerity to a small part.

Everett Sloane is good as Sergeant Borth and there are numerous character bits that stand out, notably Tito Vuolo's "Joe" Ribaudo of Cleveland, U.S.A. Leon Rothier, the erstwhile Metropolitan basso, makes his dramatic debut effectively as a priest.

H. C. Potter's direction and Motley's setting help to make a superior production of a literate and very timely play.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 7, 1944

"A Bell for Adano"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

TO GET AT the matter without undue red tape, this morning's bulletin from Broadway is eminently satisfactory. To the Cort last evening Leland Hayward brought "A Bell for Adano." In dramatizing John Hersey's novel, Paul Osborn has copied down the tones essential for a good show, and Fredric March and a huge cast are playing the roles, for the most part, as though they had lived them. Adano has a new bell, which began ringing when Major Joppolo departed after his recall; the Cort has a new bell which probably will be shaking the theatre district for some time to come.

Mr. Osborn has followed the mood of the book and has made changes only as required in the interests of a stage production. The play opens with Joppolo's arrival in Adano and tells of his efforts to persuade the townspeople the Americans are unlike the Fascists. As in the book, food is essential, and so is the town's bell, which had been taken by the Germans. Joppolo gets a new bell, but because he had countermanded his general's orders he is recalled from his post. The incident of General Marvin's ordering the carts out of Adano is spoken off-stage. One or two scenes which in the book took place elsewhere in the town have been changed to the city hall, but the important ones are there.

"A Bell for Adano" is a play of mood rather than action, for not a great deal happens as Adano is metamorphicized from fascism to democracy. Democratic processes sometimes are slow, and that occasionally is true of the play also. The second act gets a little talkative now and again, and the part of Tina—never strong even in the book — has been ground down to almost nothing in the play. But when it is going along at its best, with Major Joppolo trying to find and do the right thing for his Adano, the evening is all to the credit side. Joppolo is a nice character, a good human being; his relationships and actions are warm and honest.

* * *

Mr. March, whose last theatrical duty was as Antrobus of "The Skin of Our Teeth," gives an excellent performance as the Major. In

his hands the part radiates goodwill. Joppolo was sent as Civil Affairs administrator to Adano; he had his ideas on what to do—and when stuck, to "improvise." Mr. March manages to give a picture of a man who has taken a town to his heart, who will break rules for the common welfare. He speaks softly, he tries to understand Adano's problems, even about the bell, and he is a salesman for America. There is not a great deal of humor about Joppolo, who isn't that kind of a man, but there is real warmth. Mr. March gives that to the part.

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Some of the other characters are immense, and the actors playing them, and H. C. Potter, who directed, have seen that coloring has been right. Albert Raymo, Charles Mayer and J. Scott Smart, as the three cart drivers who interview Joppolo, all turn in perfect portraits. Tito Vuolo, as the interpreter who lived for a time in Cleveland, is bouncing, bumptious and very funny. Everett Sloane has the part of Sergeant Borth — the M. P. attached to Joppolo who asks for a transfer at the Major's recall; and Bruce MacFarlane is Captain Purvis, who reports the Major's countermanding of orders. Margo is Tina, the daughter of the fisherman, and the play's nearest approach to romantic interest. The part is small and has no bearing, but Margo keeps it from being lost altogether. Motley has designed the spacious setting, and a real bell—a big one obviously—booms for the climax.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 7, 1944

Rings In a Great Show

By HOWARD BARNES

A TRIUMPHANT drama has been made from John Hersey's novel "A Bell for Adano." Shaped to a stage pattern with great skill and feeling by Paul Osborn, played with consummate artistry by Fredric March and his fellow actors, and staged immaculately by H. C. Potter, it is a genuine theatrical event. It is common critical practice to claim that a fine war play cannot be done in war time. At the Cort there is one of the finest war plays you will ever see. In its salute to an A. M. G. major, who tries to cure a Sicilian town of Fascist sickness, it is eloquent, illuminating and altogether beautiful.

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Those are big adjectives, but this Leland Hayward production richly deserves them. The first act is leisurely enough to betray the work's literary origin, but it is utterly right in the splendid succession of scenes which constitute this glowing offering. The final passages build up a cresendo of sense and sensibility which is calculated to leave one shaken, humble and aware. The good major, busted by the very democracy which he is bringing to a squalid fishing town after our Sicilian invasion, is a figure of heroic and tragic stature. Random incidents, comic by-play and diverse characterizations are fused in a stirring artistic unity.

• • •

That is quite a trick to work with essentially episodic material. Osborn and his assistants have done it with delicacy and authority. Major Joppolo blunders around for much of the action, trying to clean the streets, get food and water to the residents of Adano and in some manner find a bell to hang in the city hall. The lines and situations have such depth and perception, though, that the vignettes fall into a magnificent whole of meaning and emotion. The townspeople are wonderful. The American soldiers are both splendid and terrible. At the final curtain "A Bell for Adano" stands as an extraordinarily pertinent stage document as well as an absorbing entertainment.

• • •

March, I would say, gives the finest performance of his career as the major. Asked for little in the way of modulated make-believe, he concentrates on sincerity and intensity in his portrayal and it becomes memorable. The scene in which a tyranical American general kicks him out of the post he has served so well, just as the new bell starts pealing, is one for the books. He handles a few romantic interludes with Margo with precise restraint and he imbues the whole performance with his conviction that democracy can work, in the Bronx, in Adano or any other place that men of good will establish freedom and decency.

• • •

Margo has a minor role as the fisherman's daughter who first senses the major's nobility, but she plays it perfectly. Everett Sloane is great as a cynical sergeant who worships his civil affairs officer; Tito Vuolo, Alexander Granach and too many others to mention fill in a rich texture of the human Sicilian background. Meanwhile, Bruce MacFarlane is excellent as a tired M. P. captain who betrays his trust. Potter has directed the large cast with exquisite timing and movement, and Motley has designed the production handsomely. "A Bell for Adano" is something to make a stage season very worth while.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 7, 1944

Fredric March Joins 'First Actor' Roster in Stirring 'Bell for Adano'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

WE HAVE been more than customarily happy this season in finding roles for actors and actors for roles. Last night there was another cause for rejoicing when we were given the part of Major Joppolo for Fredric March and Fredric March for the part of Major Joppolo. As the tired, worried, gentle, magnificently decent AMG officer assigned to restoring peace to a Sicilian town, Mr. March is splendid. And the play, "A Bell for Adano," is the best war play of this season and last season, too.

It isn't a war play, though, at that. It is at least a postwar play and perhaps a peace play, for it tells very simply and quietly a bit of what happens to an infinitesimal part of a nation after the war has torn through it and left it behind.

"A Bell for Adano" has been adapted with complete clarity by Paul Osborn from a novel by John Hersey, war correspondent for Time and Life. It has been produced by Leland Hayward, Hollywood agent who is sometimes mentioned as the husband of Margaret Sullavan. It has been directed with admirable economy and fine sense of theatre by H. C. Potter, who quit the stage some years ago to make movies.

A Moving Speech

It is, in short, the sort of drama Broadway stages like the one at the Cort Theatre were built for—a good play. It isn't heroic, and whatever deep implications it may have are the ones you read into it, rather than the ones it might have tried to force upon you. But it is holding and it rings true, and March's little talk just before the second-act curtain comes down about how Americans are best equipped to get people of other nations straightened out is a fine and moving thing.

Major Joppolo, American-born son of Italian parents, has been assigned to restore civilian life to the town of Adano, Sicily, after our invasion has passed eastward. With tact, good will and a bunch of MP's, he tries to straighten out the little problems of the little people.

Oddly, one big thing that bothers them is that the Germans took the town's bell to make rifle barrels. The bell had been 700 years old. In the course of more important events like getting food and water, Joppolo manages to horse the navy out of a new bell from a destroyer.

Dictatorial General

There is an understated bitterness about this small story of Major Joppolo, for, while he is trying to persuade the Fascist-ridden Sicilians that a new order has come and no man can dictate to another, the major himself is given a dictatorial order by a temperamental general. The general's car, passing through, is held up by a mule cart, so this high officer orders that all carts be kept out of the town—which means that no water and no food can be brought in.

Joppolo disregards the order and brings a measure of happiness to the town. His disobedience is reported and at the last he is removed from his half-done job and told to report to headquarters in Africa for further assignment—but not before the new bell is hung. The general, one was hearing last night, is not entirely a fictitious character.

There are no important secondary roles in "A Bell for Adano," but there are many colorful bits, all well played. Everett Sloane as a loyal MP, Margo as a native girl, Tito Vuolo as a Sicilian from Cleveland, Leon Rothier—once great basso of the Met—as a priest, J. Scott Smart as a cart-driver and many others give color and punch to what they have to do. I liked particularly the fisherman portrayed by Alexander Granach, a character man from Berlin and Hollywood.

"Hand in Glove"

Play by Charles K. Freeman and Gerald Savory, based on Mr. Savory's novel "Hughie Roddis"; staged by James Whale; settings designed by Samuel Leve; presented by Arthur Edison at the Playhouse Theatre, December 4, 1944.

NEW YORK POST
December 5, 1944

'Hand in Glove' An English Thriller That Has Its Points

By WILELLA WALDORF

"HAND IN GLOVE," produced at the Playhouse last night, is an English thriller of the Mrs. Belloc Lowndes school. It is interested not in keeping the identity of its murderer a secret but in exploring the psychological quirks of a killer the audience already knows. The play itself is uneven and somewhat diffuse, but its subject matter is pathologically sound and most of its characters are intelligently projected. Despite the carrying-on of a very trying first-night audience, we found it an interesting exhibit of its kind. No "Angel Street," to be sure, but certainly something for thriller addicts to see who have already taken in "Angel Street" four or five times and are looking around for something new.

The first murder is committed before the audience's eyes in a prologue laid on the old Queen's Dock at Halsey, Yorkshire. The

THE CAST

Jenny	Jean Bellows
Mr. Ramskill	George Lloyd
Auntie B.	Isobel Elsom
Hughie	Skelton Knaggs
Mr. Forsythe	St. Clair Bayfield
Mrs. Willis	Viola Roache
Lily Willis	Islay Benson
Curly Latham	Victor Beecroft
Purple Cap	Almon Bruce
Bowler Hat	Todd Stanton
Sergeant	Robin Craven
Chief Constable	Wallace Widdecombe
Man from London	Aubrey Mather

murderer is a young man who would probably be referred to over here as a "sex maniac." He is fascinated by young girls and gets a terrific thrill out of strangling them and slashing the bodies.

At Aunty B.'s boarding house, where he lives, he seems to be nothing more unusual than a rather brash young Cockney up from London to work in one of the local war plants, but Aunty B. has a nephew who is definitely simple-minded and the townsfolk promptly leap to the conclusion that he must be the killer.

The Yard Man Knows

The murderer seizes every opportunity to promote this idea, committing another murder in the process, but it all seems just a bit too obvious to the man from Scotland Yard who comes up to handle the case. He's handled a lot of cases pretty much like it before and he recognizes some familiar symptoms.

Aubrey Mather plays the man from Scotland Yard very genially indeed. George Lloyd has a little trouble remembering his Cockney accent at times, but he is almost always credible in the difficult role of the killer. Skelton Knaggs is amazingly good as the idiot boy and there is excellent character work by St. Clair Bayfield, Isobel Elsom and Viola Roache.

In an effort, apparently, to inject humor into what is fundamentally a rather grim drama, the authors have caricatured the Chief Constable and overdone some of the rest of it, but on the whole they treat the subject plausibly, and James Whale, the director, never permits it to become merely cheap.

The whole company is to be congratulated on the fortitude with which it ignored the titters and squeals of a certain portion of the audience that sounded as if it might have been recruited from the ranks of Mr. Sinatra's more witless followers.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 5, 1944

Butchered

By HOWARD BARNES

AN IDIOT and a pervert keep close company in "Hand in Glove." Between them, they make the new Playhouse offering as ghoulish and stomach-turning a bit of grand guignol as has drifted into Broadway for some time. The Charles K. Freeman-Gerald Savory play is not nearly good enough to be a tense melodramatic variation of Jack the Ripper's case history. At the same time, the touches of realism in the production make it an extremely squeamish entertainment. Quite a few good players labor on a lost cause throughout the proceedings.

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What with an explicit prologue, which puts the finger immediately on a strangler and butcher of young girls, there is nothing even moderately mystifying about the show. The small suspense that shoulders the piece through three acts is concerned entirely with the apprehension of the fellow who likes to cut up live instead of paper dolls. Since the man from Scotland Yard guesses his identity long before the climax, the offering becomes merely a matter of waiting for the final curtain.

A novel by Savory is at the root of all the unpleasantness at the Playhouse. It has one of those Yorkshire settings in which characters leave out such tidy aids to communication as the definite article and bounce in and out of Auntie B.'s kitchen for no more reason than to get a cup of tea. Samuel Leve has designed the backgrounds brilliantly and James Whale has directed the work so well that one wishes he might have a better welcome back to the theater. Whether in Yorkshire or in London, this Jack the Ripper yarn would be hard to take.

• • •

Isobel Elsom and Aubrey Mather contribute whatever common denominator of human experience is to be found in "Hand and Glove." She as the boarding house proprietress who tries to shield a gibbering nephew and unwittingly protects the real ripper, is serene and effective. Mather, as the detective, brings tremendous vigor to one or two scenes. Unfortunatly, the action is always going away from them. George Lloyd over-plays understandably in the part of Mr. Ramskill and Skelton Knaggs practically chews the scenery as daft Hughie. "Hand in Glove" is ugly without being exciting. You can read Krafft-Ebbing in the peace and quiet of your own home.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
December 5, 1944

'Hand in Glove' At The Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

THERE'S a new chiller-diller at the Playhouse. Its name is "Hand in Glove." Charles Freeman and Gerald Savory fashioned it from a novel by Mr. Savory, the "Hughie Roddis," of which I have not been previously aware. Arthur Edison presents it, with direction by James Whale, who is expert in such murder matters, and backgrounds by Samuel Leve, who knows a Yorkshire dock and a Halsey kitchen when he reproduces them. Which is to say he knows his out-of-London England.

"Hand in Glove" is no run-of-the-thrill whodunit. It's a murder melodrama in which you know the killer from the prologue. This, quite naturally, precedes the play. The interest, the excitement, the suspense stem from looking on while the dastard frames the innocent half-wit, as the Man From Scotland Yard concurrently frames the villain. Innocence triumphs. But, for a while there in 48th Street, it looks as if poor, dear, balmy Hughie were definitely on the skids.

Save for one none-too-effective sequence, which is played for laughs when it should be played for chills, "Hand in Glove" has in it everything a chiller-diller should have, including the kitchen stove. A really handsome kitchen stove, which keeps the teakettle boiling through battle, murder and almost sudden death.

Unpleasant Play

Let me come right out and tell you that "Hand in Glove" is an unpleasant play. It's not for the squeamish, the chicken-hearted or the very young. Poor, dear, balmy Hughie Roddis, the half-wit who is framed for a couple of murders—two and a half murders, really—he hasn't sense enough to commit. It's pretty hard to take for an entire evening supposed to be given over to entertainment. Only his Auntie B. could really love him and find his companionship to her liking. She does, however!

So, the Mr. Ramskill, who erases Jenny in the first act, does away with an unnamed off-stage lady in the second act and, almost, but not quite, bumps off Lily Willis—who ought to be bumped off, anyway, if only in the cause of peace-of-mind and justice—in the final stanza, continues to tighten the invisible rope on the nit-wit's neck, while the Man From Scotland Yard continues to put the finger on the rightful slayer. For the most part, it grips you while it's going on.

But, as has been hinted, there's a false note in what amounts to the middle of the play, when a would-be gripping scene turns comic on the customers. As it does so, it breaks the piece's carefully established mood, a mood which has to be re-established all over again, and which is never quite wholeheartedly recaptured.

Too Good Acting

It's in me to complain that Skelton Knaggs is too good, too realistic, as the dim-minded Hughie who doesn't get hanged by the neck until dead. Programs point out that Mr. Knaggs has been studying to be a halfwit for years, that most of his career has been devoted to the balmy boys of stage, screen and radio. As far as I'm concerned, after the long, short or medium run of "Hand in Glove" has been completed, he can be given the booby prize and sent back home to London.

Isobel Elsom, a refugee from Hollywood, is excellent as Hughie's long suffering Auntie B. It's nice to have her back on Broadway. As Mrs. Willis, Lily's mother, Viola Roache is forthright and neighborly. As the Man From Scotland Yard, Aubrey Mather is straightforward and believable. I wish the same could be said of the killer of George Lloyd and the Mr. Forsythe of St. Clair Bayfield. But it can't. You'll like Robert Craven as the local sergeant.

If you're not too squeamish, too chicken-hearted or too young, you're pretty certain to get a kick out of "Hand in Glove" at the Playhouse. Out of the greater part of it, I mean. Even so, it's rather like looking at an afflicted person who has no connection with you. Fascinating, but forbidding.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 5, 1944

'Hand in Glove' Badly Directed

By BURTON RASCOE

THE only pleasant things I have to report about "Hand in Glove," which opened at the Playhouse last night, are that the two sets designed and lighted by Samuel Leve are very realistic and that two actors in the play, Isobel Elsom and Aubrey Mather, are very good indeed. On the other side of the ledger the story is rather ghastly.

In the first place, "Hand in Glove," is an unfortunate effort on the part of Charles K. Freeman and Gerald Savory to make a melodrama out of a shilling-shocker Mr. Savory once wrote called "Hughie Roddis." It would appear that the novel was a somewhat frantic attempt on Mr. Savory's part to repudiate his surname; for it concerns one of the most distasteful of the many abnormalities recorded in Krafft-Ebing's "Psychopathia Sexualis"—compensatory mutilation.

Now, in art (as Spingarn and others tell us) the critic must not quarrel with the author over his choice of subject matter; the critic must merely take note of the author's intention and pass judgment only on the manner (or the degree of success) with which he achieved his intention. And I must say that, analyzed very closely, the play achieves pretty successfully the intention of the playwrights.

One-Actor Play

The trouble is that the play must stand or fall by the acting of one player—the one carrying the role of the murderer. Just as in "Angel Street," the actress playing the role of Mrs. Manningham must carry the whole burden of the play and, in effect, project the role of Mr. Manningham (a role that is close to the edge of the ridiculous) as well as her own, so also must the player in the role of Mr. Ramskill carry the whole burden of the horror and suspense of "Hand in Glove." And George Lloyd, who has this role, is woefully inadequate for the part. He never once got into the character last night; he never once seemed to have any conception of the nature of his role; he seemed throughout to be under the impression that he was doing a cockney variety turn in a London music hall. The play collapses under his hapless ineptitudes.

It is no disgrace that Mr. Lloyd, a talented young night club entertainer, should be incapable of understanding and projecting the role of a particularly atrocious type of "sex maniac" and one, moreover, afflicted, also, with what is called dementia praecox katatonia—a type of insanity in which all normal emotional response is absent or atrophied, while the mind functions brilliantly, cleverly and egomaniacally. But it was certainly a casting error for him to be chosen for the part.

Wrong Emphasis

James Whale, the director, seems to have been just as unsuited for this job as was Mr. Lloyd; for he made the prime mistake of assuming that because suspicion of the murders is thrown upon the idiot boy throughout most of the play, the dramatic interest should be also centered upon the boy. It should not. There is no mystery about the murders; the audience is shown Mr. Ramskill in the rather too explicitly horrifying act of murderous sadism in the prologue; the audience knows, therefore, that the idiot boy

is not the maniac. He should have been kept off stage or in the barkground as much as possible. Instead, he dominates every scene. And the physical simulation of idiocy is too repellent to be borne (by sensitive persons) on the stage for any length of time.

Mr. Whale, who did a brilliant pob in staging "Journey's End" 16 years ago and has had a successful directing career since then, apparently is out of his element when handling a psychopathic melodrama. And because he is wanting in technique for this highly specialized kind of theater, not only was Mr. Lloyd very bad but all the other actors were, too—excepting only Miss Elsom and Mr. Mather, the one as the foster-mother of the idiot boy and the other as a Scotland Yard detective. The others are experienced players, but their direction was incoherent. The result is a horror play with no horror in it because the acting is so bad no illusion of reality is created.

NEW YORK SUN
December 5, 1944

'Hand in Glove' Grim and Atmospheric Study of Murders in Yorkshire

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"HAND IN GLOVE," presented last evening upon the stage of the Playhouse, is a study of murder in an estuary township of Yorkshire, and as a piece of theater it is atmospheric and grimly fascinating. Arthur Edison brought it into the newly alive Forty-eighth street without having tested it on the road.

This new drama by Charles K. Freeman and Gerald Savory is not a pleasant play. One of its characters is the village idiot, hopeless and incurable, who comes to be a strange sort of hero and evokes both shudders and compassion. Another is a moody killer, reminiscent of the bellhop in the Emlyn Williams play, "Night Must Fall," who went around cutting off women's heads. It is not a tight play, often being given over to the prattlings of the local color characters. But for most of the way it holds your interest. And it is designed for chills and tremors.

The psychopathic Charlie Ramskill, a likable fellow when not engaged in slaughter, strangles young Jenny to death near the old Queens dock and slashes her violently. He murders another neighborhood girl during a violent storm and seeks to do in a third, always working with his hands in gloves. He attempts to fasten suspicion on the half-wit Hughie, for whom the Yorkshire word is daft. Hughie has a way of going about collecting bright bits of metal and fragments of broken china, and these pieces have sharp edges.

The first murder is committed in the prologue and the three subsequent acts are concerned with the efforts of the law to establish the identity of the killer. The unhurried Man From London comes in on the job and builds his case slowly but cleverly, working with a thoroughness that is in the best tradition of Scotland Yard.

"Hand in Glove" has been skillfully directed by James Whale and so it is played by Aubrey Mather as the detective, George Lloyd as Ramskill and Skelton Knaggs as the daft Hughie, who seemed to understand readings from the Bible more than anything else. Isobel Elsom, to be remembered as the raffish old girl who was murdered in "Ladies in Retirement," gets a lot of spirit into the playing of Auntie B, who has been caring for the tragic Hughie since his mother died in childbirth. But Mr. Mather's is the performance of the evening.

Samuel Leve's settings, showing a deserted street near the dock and the kitchen in Auntie B's house, are enormously effective.

"Hand in Glove," based on Mr. Savory's novel, "Hughie Roddis," is a psychological melodrama that falters here and there but it has many absorbing portions. And nightmarish ones, too.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 5, 1944

'Hand in Glove' a Curdled Chiller Abaht One of These 'Ere Rippers

By JOHN CHAPMAN

SOME of Mike Todd's actors intend to open a Grand Guignol called "Spook Scandals" Friday night—but last night Arthur Edison beat them to it and presented "Hand in Glove" at the Playhouse. This is a 1944 version of "The Lodger" with the extra added attraction of an idiot boy who makes Dude Lester seem like William Howard Taft.

It's a curdled blood-curdler, having some minutes of authentic horror and longer stretches of not getting anywhere. First-nighters hissed the villain, chittered excitedly and shushed each other as Jack the Ripper came back to war-time Halsey, Yorkshire, England. I wanted very much to get more scared than I did.

There is no mystery in "Hand in Glove," for right off the bat you see this 'ere now murderer, who is not a proper person, do a girl in down by the Old Queens Dock, and he makes quite a mess of her indeed. Then he goes back to his lodging house, where he is quite the gay card.

Played by an Expert

Also sheltered by the landlady is the landlady's idiot nephew, whose acting is somewhere between the elder Lon Chaney's best efforts and Jim Barton in the final stages of his story about the drunk and the mad dog. A man by the remarkable name of Skelton Knaggs does the job with a positively heroic amount of eye-rolling and drooling. The program says Mr. Knaggs has specialized in half-wit parts during most of his acting career, and by gum I believe it.

Suspicion naturally falls upon this moon-struck creature, and when another girl is throttled and slashed the neighbors are in a fair state about it. But a man from Scotland Yard finally gets upon the right track.

As the killer, George Lloyd is capital. He is smart-alecky, crafty, thoroughly offensive and quite menacing. Aubrey Mather is the season's best detective, Isobel Elsom is good as the landlady and Islay Benson is a rather appealing poor wretch who learns the murderer's secret before Mather does and almost dies of it. There are two excellent sets by Samuel Leve.

James Whale, the director, seems to have got all the horror he could out of the script. The trouble lies, I think, in the fact that Charles K. Freeman and Gerald Savory, who adapted the play from a novel by Savory, failed to establish grounds for suspense. You know the killer is shifting suspicion to the idiot boy—but you don't care enough about the lad or worry enough about him to get in a sweat.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
December 5, 1944

Murder Just Passes Muster

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE simplest label—though perhaps not the aptest description—for *Hand in Glove* is that old standby, "psychological thriller." That will at least do rough justice to the several elements that combine in the play better than they cohere. It is a grim yarn, which pivots about two very abnormal characters—a psychopathic young murderer and a half-wit on whom he tries to fasten his crimes; as such it creates a rather darker mood than the ordinary thriller requires. At the same time, it is a fairly routine exercise in the detection of a criminal, with all the dodges and devices that make for suspense. On both scores, it is far from expert, and sometimes crude. But the combination gives it a certain half-theatrical, half-neurotic tension; and simply as theater I freely admit that it held me. I recommend it because, despite all its faults, it is the best thing of its kind that Broadway has offered in some time.

There is no mystery about the play's murders. In a prologue, laid at night near the deserted docks of a Yorkshire town, young Ramskill strangles a young girl he has brought there; young Ramskill being one of those psychopaths who, fearing they will be impotent with women, have to get a sexual release through killing them. Ramskill boards with the aunt of Hughie Roddis, a harmless imbecile who wanders about at night. With the townspeople already vaguely suspicious of Hughie in connection with the crime, it is easy for Ramskill, while posing as his friend, to build up a strong case against him—a case that involves a second murder. Thereafter Ramskill has to match wits with a man from Scotland Yard; and the contest, along with further violence, goes right on to the end.

* * *

As a study in detection, *Hand in Glove* is suspenseful enough, but not very adroit. In such circumstances, a "good" criminal should give himself away only once or twice, in as subtle a fashion as possible. Ramskill's behavior is so frequently and patently guilty that a really smart Scotland Yarder would have him in the bag in three minutes. Actually it is what Ramskill is rather than how he handles himself—it is the character rather than the criminal—that enforces your interest. Yet at the same time it is the situation that saves the character; for in a really serious sense Ramskill does not come off. Neither, I think, does the idiot boy. Had *Hand in Glove* been a horror play of real distinction and high intensity, Hughie might have given it the final turn of the screw. As it is, he is grotesque without being dramatic.

Hand in Glove has also several dull stock characters that both slow down the action and weaken the atmosphere; and some of the dialogue is so-so or worse. The play, in a sense, is an in-betweener, rising above the machine-made thriller in its possibilities, but falling short of them in its effect. Yet the effect, though often wrong and often routine, does have a certain force.

The production helps with that. Both George Lloyd as Ramskill and Skelton Knaggs as Hughie have very difficult assignments. By any severe standards of acting, they handle them rather obviously; but at their own level they are both quite good. As Hughie's aunt, Isobel Elsom is good at the same level. However, only Aubrey Mather, as the Scotland Yard man, plays with genuine assurance and ease: he alone doesn't seem to be acting. Samuel Leve's sets both enhance the mood.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 5, 1944

"Hand in Glove"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE theatre turned its sinister eye on the pathological melodrama last evening when "Hand in Glove" brought a maniac, a Yard man and an assorted group of Cockney characters to the stage of the Playhouse. If the function of melodrama is to send its audience into a mass jump at the sudden opening of a door, the law-abiding citizens at the Playhouse were jumping in good order last night. The play, concocted by Charles K. Freeman and Gerald Savory, is not the greatest one ever written, being as full of holes as circumstantial evidence, but it does hold the interest. In addition to this, it gives a group of actors the chance to turn in some good performances as criminals and cops. There should be a handshake this morning to "Hand in Glove."

* * *

There is no mystery about the events contained in the play, which has been based upon Mr. Savory's "Hughie Roddis." In a prologue a young man is seen strangling a girl, and during the course of the evening he strangles one or two more. The townspeople, aided by the guilty man, attach the